

Western New Mexico University's Presentation to the Legislative Finance Committee

We welcome the interest of the legislature in student outcomes. Institutions have invested heavily in student support programs for decades and the added incentives provide acknowledgement of this effort. We have always been concerned with student success, because when a student fails to complete a course or a degree, we have failed. This damages not only our reputation, but more importantly, it may harm students who leave without a degree or the skills necessary for a successful life, and often with a crushing amount of loan debt that may impede their progress for years.

While many academic universities can claim a unique mission, Western New Mexico University's role in higher education is unique even by national standards. The uniqueness is amplified by the task of producing everything from General Education Degrees (GED) to masters' degrees. We are an open enrollment institution meaning that the only entrance requirement is to have a high school diploma or its equivalent. We offer the laid off mine worker courses to get back in the market. We provide the high school student an opportunity to continue his traditional education. We provide the working single mother a place to advance her knowledge as she pursues her degree part time. WNMU provides the senior citizen a place to gain a degree that he never thought was possible in life. Our classrooms host all ages and abilities through the variety of students seeking to further their education.

Student Profile (Based on Fall 2012 undergraduates, excluding Concurrent students.)

A snapshot of our students is as follows:

- 20% of our students are dual-enrolled high school students. WNMU has 15 partner high schools. 146 of our nearly 500 first-time-in-college students were former dual enrolled students.
- 52% of our students had/have to take at least one remedial course. 26% of our students have had to stop out during their academic career for a variety of reasons.
- 72% are or have been Pell recipients. 54% are 1st generation.
- 6% are lottery scholarship recipients. WNMU received \$587,406 in lottery funds last year for 268 recipients. Students on average lost the lottery scholarship after 3.5 terms. Of the 70 students who received the lottery scholarship in the Spring 2007 only 15 used seven to eight semesters of the scholarship.
- We are a Hispanic Serving Institution with 51% of our undergraduate students reported as Hispanic.
- 53% of our undergraduates are traditional 18-24 year olds. However, our average student is 29 years old and takes 12 credit hours per semester. 74% of our regular undergraduates are full time.
- The average amount of student debt upon graduating is \$25,697 compared to the national average of \$27,000.

Because we are open admissions, our graduates overcome obstacles typically not experienced at limited access institutions. We take that person who requires remediation and barely graduated from high school and provide him the necessary education that upon graduation, he can compete with any other graduate in the world. Though our students come from challenging backgrounds and do not initially test at the highest levels, they go on to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, nurses, policemen, teachers,

social workers, artists, and all of the other professions that other universities provide. This year we even had one of our students accepted into Stanford Law School. But the amazing piece to this is that we are providing an incredible value added benefit to these students at a fraction of the cost of most universities. Our tuition ranks among the lowest. With the national average around \$8,800, our 2012-13 tuition for the year including fees was \$4,300 for 18 credit hours per semester. This noted we can do better as we know that our objective is to educate students to the highest levels and get them the necessary degree or certificate to contribute to our society, our state and to themselves in positive ways. However, if we fail, we recognize those consequences as well.

Failure to complete degrees results from a variety of problems and challenges. These could be summarized as:

Academic Preparation: subject matter knowledge, study skills and general literacy

Academic Engagement: how well the curriculum meshes with student expectations and goals

Financial Risk: addressed with financial aid programs

Social Engagement: how well students integrate socially with peers and the campus environment.

Non-Traditional: competing obligations and interruptions in educational plans.

Life Challenges that unexpectedly interrupt or terminate education: loss of income, loss of family members, health, concerns with children or family, divorce, etc.

Every college has had multiple, long standing programs to address these issues. The most vexing of which has proven to be inadequate academic preparation. We can provide financial support, a welcoming supportive environment, tutoring and accommodations for non-traditional and traditional students, but without sufficient academic preparation and engagement, the potential for student success diminishes significantly.

Our greatest challenge is to remediate years of previous behavior in only a few months of course work. While touching and endearing student success stories may result, these are the exception. What is never addressed in the Complete College America (CCA) and similar metrics is the impact of failure. I share this data from my institution because I believe it is not significantly different from others in the state. At Western New Mexico University only 12% of remediated recent high school graduates attain a bachelor's degree in 10 years. Those who fail to complete a degree accrue an average of \$12,526 in loan debt while attempting an average of 43 credit hours. Whether these credits are funded through the formula or not, expenses are incurred by the institutions and the state. The results are financially catastrophic for the individual and an ineffective use of scarce state resources.

It is much more efficient to support dual credit. Most research shows that engagement in school and learning begins at a much earlier age and Western New Mexico University has made a substantial effort to provide students early exposure to college level course work and expectations through dual credit

programs. Our partnership with regional high schools has produced gratifying results; a study conducted at WNMU in 2010 noted a significant decline in the need for remediation of students from our primary high schools. Remediation rates for first time freshmen less than 20 years of age from Deming high school dropped from 79% in 2006, when our emphasis on dual credit began, to 63% in 2010 after 4 years of significant program growth. What was most interesting were the improved placement scores and reduction in remediation requirements for students from the same schools, even though they had not participated in WNMU dual credit programs. Discussions with some high school officials supported the theory that such students may have responded to the behavior of their peers who had participated in dual credit. In general, remediation requirements of all first time degree seeking freshmen, declined from 87% in 2001 and to 65% in 2009-10.

Remediation is not the preferred option for college preparation, but it is needed for many students, especially those who are older and may not have used their academic skills in the workplace. WNMU and many others are exploring ways to make remediation more effective such as concurrent enrollment where remedial efforts are used in context with regular courses. In compliance with the Governor's requirements, we have created a plan to upgrade the way we deliver remedial or developmental instruction. In writing we are piloting co-requisite courses in the first composition course and the DVSW 102 course so that a student completes both courses at the same time. In math, we are piloting accelerated courses; whereby, a student could complete both the remedial math class and the regular college entry math class in the same semester. In career and technical areas, we are working on embedding basic skills needed into the vocational courses themselves.

Track 2 – simplistic measures in a complex environment

The CCA considers time to completion for all those who do so, including those who are remediated. However, caution is advised when applying traditional definitions of student persistence and success. This convenient metric reflects an out dated model where traditional students enter an institution and persevere through 4 uninterrupted years to a degree. This is seldom the case as students behave differently from their predecessors due to on-line instruction, changing demographics, and new economic conditions. This is why the current efforts to reward institutions based on student persistence may be partially flawed; in many cases undergraduate students do not stay with one institution their entire academic career. They may intend to take only general education courses or remediation at more affordable or conveniently located institutions; they may alter their goals upon exploration; and life situations change. Approximately 25% of students attend 2 or more institutions over their academic career which means significant numbers may have been successful within the system of higher education, yet were reported as failing to graduate by one of the institutions that provided support.

In our typical graduating class, a third of them transferred from another institution. On average they bring a total of 70 to 80 credit hours with them, which were partially subsidized by the state with the remainder paid for by students. Often these credits may not have produced a degree. We provide a means for the state and the students to recover this investment.

Comparisons with the CCA Measures

This report provides completion rates for remediated students seeking a bachelor's degree. These are listed as those completing their program in 4 years, 6 years and 8 years. Based on this simple comparison, remediated student who complete a degree compared favorably with all students.

Original CCA Measure (Outcomes 2 Bachelor's Degrees All Other 4 Yr Institutions)

		Beginning Cohort Fall 2003	4 Yrs	100% time (%)	6 yrs	150% time (%)	8 yrs	200% time (%)
Bachelor's Degrees All Other Four-Year Institution (Cohort identified in Fall 2003)								
<u>Bachelor's Degrees</u> 1 st Time FT								
	TOTAL Students	305	38	12.5%	59	19.3%	73	23.9%
	Remedial: Took Remedial Courses	213	25	11.7%	44	20.7%	56	26.3%

However, due to the disproportionately large numbers of students requiring remediation, the results for total students are merely a slightly moderated reflection of the remediated group. When the comparison is shifted to students with and without a history of remediation significant differences emerge. The subsequent table uses the same reporting cohorts but with additional data for separated cohorts.

Outcomes for Remedial and Non Remedial

	2003 CCA Cohort	Completion Time				Bach Degree from			Avg WNMU Debt		Course History		Recent NM HS Grads	
		4 Yrs	6 Yrs	8 Yrs	10 Yrs	WNMU	Elsewhere	Anywhere	Grads	Non	Repeated	Successful	No	Dual
No Remediation	76	13 17%	14 18%	16 21%	19 25%	19	3 4%	22 29%	\$13,426	\$9,682	17%	72%	46	9 20%
Any Remedial (Incl Failures)	229	12 5%	25 11%	32 14%	33 14%	33	11 5%	44 19%	\$19,878	\$12,526	24%	59%	150	21 14%
Remedial Failure	88	0 0%	1 1%	1 1%	1 1%	1	3 3%	4 5%	\$7,595		34%	31%	61	8 13%

Observations:

As expected, students who do not require remediation complete much more frequently and at faster rates than students who take such courses. What is less obvious are the resources required to get remediated students to the completion of a degree.

Ignoring the traditional graduation rate criteria, 29% of non-remediated WNMU students attain a degree somewhere in the state system within 10 years of entry. Only 19% of remedial students complete during the same period.

Though remedial students persevere, they do so at considerable expense. Remediated students have to repeat 24% of their regular courses and earn a grade of C or better only 59% of the time. Students failing a remedial course repeat 34% and succeed in only 31% of their courses.

What is seldom considered is the financial burden on the individual students. Course repetition and low success rates result in prolonged graduation time and increased expense to the individual and the state. A partial measure of this expense is borrowing through financial aid programs. The loan debt of remedial students is on average \$2,844 over that of non-remedial students. To make matters worse, students who do not complete a degree at WNMU or elsewhere accrue an average debt of \$9,442. For those requiring remediation that amount is \$10,162 in personal debt. The loan debt for all non-remedial students completing a degree was \$9,474.

There is no substitute for academic preparation in terms of college success. Selecting for traditional aged students recently graduating from a New Mexico high school produced 196 students. At that time

the WNMU dual credit programs were small with only 30 of the 196 with previous credits. The completion rates for the 166 with previous credit were 18% with an average debt of \$11,067. Those with dual credit completed at a 33% rate and a similar debt burden.

Examples of WNMU Programs Related to Student Success Rates:

In our institutional datamart, success in course outcomes is tracked for every student, every term. Those receiving less than a “C” or a “W” are considered unsuccessful and the success ratio is calculated for all lower and upper division courses as well as remediation courses. In addition, we can track the success of remediated students in subsequent courses to assess for courses with high failure rates.

In an effort to provide support, we have created some additional programs to maximize the opportunity for student success. Some of these efforts include:

- **Office of First Year Experience (Academic Support Center)**
The Office of First Year Experience is formerly the Academic Support Center. Along with the functions of freshman advising and testing, the office has expanded to include New Student Orientation. New Student Orientation was changed to include 2-day or overnight orientations, single day orientations, and a continuous online orientation. We have also added a New Student Orientation to the Deming Learning Center for the students attending full-time at that center. Also, New Student Orientation is a year-long program led by Orientation Leaders that have been assigned to students and work with them throughout the academic year.
- **Outreach Programs (Dual Enrollment)**
The Office of Outreach Programs is formerly the Dual Enrollment Office. Where dual enrollment is still a function of Outreach Programs, other functions include community outreach and HERO (Higher Education Reaching Out). The HERO program has been set up in 5 area high schools (Deming, Gallup, Cobre, Silver, and Animas). This program is a partnership with the Department of Social Work. Students participate in opportunities that prepare them for education beyond high school.
- This summer WNMU will host about 30 students in the Outreach Youth Institute (OYI). This is a one week summer residential program for high school juniors and seniors. These students will come to WNMU and stay in the residence halls and learn leadership and academic skills to prepare them for college.
- The number of student activities has been increased and include increasingly popular outdoor activities such as hiking and camping.
- Our early alert system allows faculty and staff to notify advisors of students having difficulty; the advisors reach out to help.

These efforts have increased retention rates (as defined by a freshman continuing to the sophomore year) from 49.9% in 2011 to 55% in 2012. It is too early to claim victory as more years are needed to determine if there is a long-term, consistent increase in retention.

Examples of how WNMU adjusted to be responsive to the funding formula

Over the last year, WNMU made some adjustments in terms of the funding formula. These included:

- Offering an incentive for faculty to teach more students above their traditional loads.
- Offering an incentive for faculty to work on retaining students in their classes.

The results of effectiveness were mixed. In terms of the positive outcomes, there was a decrease in attrition rates across the piloted courses. However, it was difficult to measure whether this was because of the program or some other variables. In terms of the incentive, it is challenging to provide an equitable means to pay the faculty. Some courses like anatomy and physiology are naturally difficult and have high attrition rates, while others do not. Creating a one-size-fits-all approach to defining success fails to account for nuances to individual classes and in some cases could result in grade inflation. Another negative effect would be the faculty member not providing the proper advice to the student's best interest. For example, if a student was failing a course prior to the last day to drop without academic penalty, a faculty member might be inclined to inflate either the grade or the probability that the grade would ultimately be a passing grade by the end of the class. Based on this, the student remains in the class when he should have dropped. The student ultimately receives a failing grade with additional consequences of losing scholarships and being negatively impacted in terms of future opportunities. Meanwhile, for that particular class, the faculty member is rewarded with incentive pay because the student stayed in the class.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that New Mexico is headed in the right direction by rewarding institutions based on outcomes. However, I provide caution in two areas: unintended consequences and one-size-fits all mentality.

First, beware of unintended consequences. For example, funding has been cut for student credit hour generation. Simultaneously, funding is provided for course completion, but not at the same rate as the cut to student credit hour generation. This has an adverse effect on dual enrollment. Historically, universities benefitted by receiving funding for dual enrollment via student credit hour funding. Dual enrollment students do not pay tuition so the only source of revenue for providing these courses comes through the state funding formula. If dual enrollment is not adequately funded, the unintended consequence would be for universities and community colleges to reduce or eliminate dual enrollment programs because the funds are not present to afford those programs.

Secondly, not all institutions are created equally. The mission and student profile of WNMU is significantly different than that of other New Mexico institutions. We take students who could not gain

access to other universities and provide the education to allow those students to be competitive against the best. Our value added is significantly different. Similarly, a research university is going to be intensely dependent on additional dollars to support its research efforts if it is to remain competitive in the national market. Performance measures need to account for these differences and reward success within the mission and the contributions to the State of New Mexico.

At Western New Mexico University we will continue to do our part in contributing to the State's economy and quality of life. More importantly, we are proud of our role at improving the individual lives of our students and will continue to strive for excellence. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present today.